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Rubina Ramji
Cape Breton University, ruby_ramji@cbu.ca

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Halal Love (and Sex)

Abstract

This is a film review of *Halal Love (and Sex)* (2015) directed by Assad Fouladkar.

Keywords

Sex, Halal, Love, Marriage, Divorce, Islam

Author Notes

Rubina (Ruby) Ramji is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Cape Breton University. After serving as a Chair of the Religion, Film and Visual Culture Group for the American Academy of Religion and then on the steering committee, Rubina continues to serve on the Executive Committee for the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion as President and is the Film Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film. Her research activities focus on the areas of religion, media and identity, religion in Canada, and religion and immigration.



Halal Love (and Sex)
(2015)
Directed by Assad Fouladkar

Halal Love (and Sex) offers a glimpse into the love lives of three couples: based on real life events, it presents three interwoven stories about the affairs of the heart, as they play out in the culturally liberal yet religious conservative city of Beirut. Three couples, all devout Muslims, display how they are sometimes aided and often hindered by Shari'a law in the way they live and love.

Far from the world of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism that is often the plot line to a popular film about Islam today, *Halal Love (and Sex)* provides a comedic and heartbreaking view of the laws that surround marriage, relationships, divorce and...well...sex in Islam. The film begins

with a school teacher trying to explain how children are conceived to a class of young school children; she explains that a worm comes out of the man and walks over and enters the woman, which then becomes a baby. Needless to say, various irrational explanations are often given to children when adults try to explain the "birds and the bees" (remember the baby-carrying stork?). Setting the tone for the rest of the film, the viewer soon realizes that some interpretations of religious laws, in this case Islamic Shari'a law, often seem as irrational.

In the first story, Awatef and her husband Salim are happily married with two young girls, yet Awatef finds herself physically exhausted from her daily routine and tries to find a way to ward off her loving husband's nightly pursuits of lovemaking. Using the Islamic law which states that a husband is allowed to take four wives to her advantage, Awatef find herself a wife to replace her when her husband's sexual demands are too tiring for her. Although Salim loves his wife dearly and even espouses the Islamic edict that if a man cannot treat his wives equally, only take one wife, Awatef cannot help see the idea of a second wife as a huge boon to her own life; someone with whom to also share the cooking, cleaning and childrearing. What Awatef comes to soon realize in her life is that her husband and children can also come to enjoy having a second wife around, perhaps a little too much.

The second story revolves around a young jealous husband, Mokhtar, who keeps divorcing his beautiful wife Batoul during fits of jealous anger. Unfortunately, after claiming to divorce his wife for a third time, he finds himself unable to reconcile with her as they have reached their third divorce and remarriage. Mokhtar realizes that his rage has gotten himself into a bind, as a single pronouncement of "I divorce you" carries the full weight of the law. The only way to remarry his wife a fourth time under Islamic law is for Batoul to first marry another man, consummate the marriage and then get divorced from the new husband.

The third halal love story follows a newly divorced woman, Loubna, who has reconnected with her first love from her youth, Abu Ahmad. In order to pursue a halal relationship with each other, they get temporarily married, as Abu Ahmad already has a wife. This particular religious law helps Loubna discover Abu Ahmad's true character, rather than relying on old romantic memories from years gone by. Even though she suffers from societal pressures to avoid being seen publicly with other men now that she is divorced, it is made clear that in this situation Loubna actually has an advantage over other religious communities living in Beirut, where divorce is the equivalent to widowhood. Although Loubna finds herself living in a religiously conservative society, she is also free to get divorced and pursue her dreams as a single woman.

Halal Love (and Sex) allows the viewer to not only understand how religion governs the love lives of Muslims, but it also allows the viewer to understand that the affairs of the heart and body are truly universal - we all face societal, cultural and personal hurdles when it comes to falling in love, being in love, choosing a partner to marry, getting divorced, and of course, having sex.